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ੴ ਸਤਿ ਨਾਮੁ ਕਰਤਾ ਪੁਰਖੁ ਨਿਰਭਉ ਨਿਰਵੈਰੁ ਅਕਾਲ ਮੂਰਤਿ ਅਜੂਨੀ ਸੈਭੰ ਗੁਰ ਪ੍ਰਸਾਦਿ ॥ ਜਪੁ ॥ ਆਦਿ ਸਚੁ ਜੁਗਾਦਿ ਸਚੁ ॥ ਧੈਰੁ ਸਚੁ ਨਾਨਕੁ ਹੋਸੀ ਭੀ ਸਚੁ ॥ ੧ ॥ ਜੇਠੈ ਸੋਚਿ ਨ ਹੋਵਈ ਜੇ ਸੋਚੀ ਲਖ ਵਾਗ ॥ ਚੁਪੈ ਚੁਪਨ ਹੋਵਈ ਜੇ ਲਇ ਠਹਾਨਿ ਵਤਾਗ ॥ ਰੂਖਿ ਆਰੂਖਨ ਉਤਰੀ ਜੇ ਬੰਨਾਪੁ ਰੀਆ ਭਾਗ ॥ ਸਹਸਿ ਆਣ ਪਾਲਖ ਹੋਹਿ ਤਇਕਨ ਚਲੇ ਨਾਲਿ ॥ ਕਿਵੇ ਸਚਿਆਰ ਹੋਈ ਮੈ ਕਿਵੇ ਕੂੜੈ ਤੁਟੈ ਪਾਲਿ ॥ ਹੁਕਮਿ ਰਜਾਈ ਚਲਣਾ ਨਾਨਕ ਲਿਖਿਆ ਨਾਲਿ ॥ ੧ ॥ ਹੁਕਮੀ ਹੋਵਾਨੀ ਆਕਾਰ ਹੁਕਮੁ ਨ ਕਹਿਆ ਜਾਈ ॥ ਹੁਕਮੀ ਹੋਵਾਨੀ ਜੀਅ ਹੁਕਮਿ ਮਿਲੈ ਵਡਿਆਈ ॥ ਹੁਕਮੀ ਉਤਮੁ ਨੀਚੁ ਹੁਕਮਿ ਲਿਖਿ ਦੁਖ ਸੁਖ ਪਾਈਆ ਹਿ ॥ ਇਕਨਾ ਹੁਕਮੀ ਬਖਸੀ ਸਇਕਿ ਹੁਕਮੀ ਸਦਾ ਭੁਵਾਈਆ ਹਿ ॥ ਹੁਕਮੈ ਮੰਦਾ ਰਿਸ ਬੁਕੈ ਬਾਹਰਿ ਹੁਕਮ ਨ ਕੋਇ ॥ ਨਾਨਕ ਹੁਕ

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Postcolonial and Postmodern Perspectives on Sikhism



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Abstract and Keywords

This essay discusses the context of the formation of 'Sikhism', a term that has served since the nineteenth century to identify Sikh thought and praxis as a world religion. This context arguably extends beyond the historical conditions of an emergent Eurocentric modernity and coloniality to the contemporary discourses of Euro-American postmodernity and postcoloniality. Whilst an examination of this Western contextualization of an Indian praxis is essential to understand the transition from a precolonial sikhi to modern/colonial Sikhism, this study examines this contextualization as both exceeding and disrupting the linear temporality suggested by the prefixes pre- and post- (e.g. precolonial to postcolonial, premodern to postmodern). In response, the essay posits a postcolonial sikhi(sm): that is, a living tradition that reanimates a precolonial sikhi within the Western imaginary and yet escapes the reinscription of the modern/colonial frame.

Keywords: Postcolonial, Postmodern, Colonial Modernity, Tricontinentalism, sikhi, Sikhism, sikhi(sm), Translation, Representation, Pluriversal

Introduction

THE relation of Sikhism to postcolonial and postmodern discourse has received little attention within the Western academic discourse. Indeed, the question of the relevancy of these terms to the Sikh religion remains unresolved. Though scholars have applied postmodern *or* postcolonial theory to the study of Sikhism (Gurbhagat Singh 1999), there has been a paucity of works that examine the postmodern *and* postcolonial as inseparable. This essay therefore explores the pre- and postcolonial together with the pre- and postmodern and thereby will entertain the possibility of a counter-discourse to

the colonial/modern conceptualization of Sikhism as a world religion that has often been perpetuated within postcolonial/modern thought.

In order to comprehend the relationship of Sikh 'religion' to post/colonialism and post/modernism it is necessary to further examine the political, economic, and cultural nexus by which colonialism (and neocolonialism) sustained itself. The transformation of precolonial *sikhi* into the modern/colonial Sikhism, a project instigated by British colonialists to define the Sikhs as one party among India's many, was in turn consolidated by the Singh Sabha (1870–1920) which sought the political legitimacy that 'a civilized religion' brought. Such a reading of religion largely mimicked the Protestant model—a monotheistic creed, codified tenets of belief, a canon of scripture, a prophetic history, an emphasis on individual morality, critique of idol worship and empty ritual. Yet whilst the colonial naming of Sikhism as a world religion promised recognition, it also subjected the Sikhs to the disciplinary gaze of the British. By means of nomenclature and census, the British inscribed identities that their subjects were behoved to fulfil, thereby sanctioning themselves—a foreign power—as the only secular authority (p. 283) capable of transcending 'petty factionalism'. Indeed, the colonial construction of Indian modernity, nationalism, and secularity are all inextricably tied to and are formed out of an Enlightenment discourse on 'religion' as unruly emotion. The inscription of religion as a marker of identity under British rule was not discontinued with the creation of the modern, independent nation state but continued under the guise of secular nationalism. Hence the discourses of both coloniality and postcoloniality have marginalized Sikhs through a frame of modernity that has reduced them to the category of religion, a depoliticized realm marked as subjective via processes of internalization and personalization.

This political manufacturing of Sikhism, however, presents a historical and discursive dissonance with the Gur-Sikh imaginary, precisely because the drive to formulate beliefs into a 'systematic theology' is resisted within the tradition itself given its privileging of poetry and music as primary epistemological modes. It will be argued that this dissonance continues beyond the colonial project through regimes of translation and representation, such that in order to imagine the future discursive framework for Sikhs it is necessary to tarry with the double bind of *sikhi(sm)*—where the negotiation of precolonial *sikhi* and modern Sikhism is kept in play. This double bind acknowledges that the past colonial imposition cannot be simply erased by a romantic leap into precolonial times; nor can the construction of Sikhism as a 'modern religion' be sustained for it threatens the sovereignty of *sikhi* by delimiting it into a pacified and de-politicised interiority: *sant-sipahi* ('saint-soldier') becomes merely *sant*.

Problematizing Postcolonial and Postmodern Perspectives

1. The Global Condition of Modern Coloniality

'Colony' is a term derived from the Latin *colere*, meaning 'to cultivate' or 'to dwell, inhabit', which slowly evolved from referencing a dwelling or farm to denote a settlement established in a foreign place. Mishra and Hodge (2005: 378–7) have noted that 'colony' came to connote an 'invasive settlement', one that involved 'domination' and 'improvement'. Such domination and improvement were primarily driven by the vagaries of economic demands for resources or for commercial self-interest. In short, the economics of colonialism were designed so as to ensure domestic political stability.

The East India Company was clearly situated within a colonial project; however, after the Sepoy Rebellion of 1857 there was a marked shift in British political involvement in India from the colonial to the imperial. In this shift the 'peripheral' colony came under the systematic and bureaucratic control by the government at the 'centre'. Young has argued that it is precisely this coupling of ideological control and financial gain that differentiates imperialism from colonialism (Young 2001: 17). To assert such ideological (p. 284) control, it was necessary to create and exert control over existing cultural and educational institutions. Furthermore, misappropriations of evolution lent a scientific authority to populist notions of racial and/or cultural hierarchies, thereby lending to the imperial cause a moralizing rhetoric of the White Man's Burden. As such, the political and economic advantages of imperialism were couched in the rhetoric of universal freedom and liberty, thereby legitimizing the elision of other races and cultures from self-governance. This elision has been aptly termed by Young as the 'paradox of ethnocentric egalitarianism' (2001: 32).

The continuation of this rhetoric in neocolonial discourse demonstrates that with the waning of colonial endgames, the political shift from colony to independent nation came to mask a continuing economic imperialism. Neocolonialism denotes an economic system of exploitation that operates upon an unequal system of exchange, wherein the Euro-American centre typically exhausts the resources of the periphery, while at the same time enforcing the consumption of its products by the periphery as politically expedient if not economically obligatory. Independence thus led to a new form of subservience—to the economic system of international capital now managed by indigenous elites—that emerged to fill the vacuum created by the collapse of the imperial system. The

ethnocentric egalitarianism of the colonial past indeed continues in today's corporate and industrial military complexes which combine the use of hard, military, and economic power with soft, cultural power (promotion of a Western-styled democracy) to form a governmental precedent through which the 'civilized' and 'developed' world may extract resources from 'underdeveloped' ex-colonies given the promise of liberty and enlightenment (Young 2001: 40).

This continuation of economic domination problematizes the temporal marker of postcolonialism, as though colonialism has come to an end: 'the postcolonial is *post*, that is, coming after, colonialism and imperial [*sic*] in its first sense of domination by direct rule. It is not, however, *post* to imperialism in its second sense, that is of a general system of a power relation of economic and political domination' (Young 2001: 44). This second sense of postcolonialism refers to what Akhil Gupta calls the '*condition* of postcoloniality', whereby the promise of material change (developmentalism, agrarian capitalism, technological innovations) comes to shape economic and political activity, but also the very epistemology and identity of peoples and their cultures (1998: ix, 338).

Along with Gikandi, then, the postcolonial must be understood as a continuing negotiation between the precolonial, the colonial, and postcolonial (1996: 14). Thus, though the attainment of Independence marks a unique juncture in the history of a nation, postcolonialism refers to how that newly emerging sovereignty is nevertheless severely compromised by the economic, material, and cultural conditions dictated by the interests of international capitalism, which remains largely governed by former colonial and imperial powers. It is within such a context that the Sikh struggle for justice should be understood given the governmental atrocities of Partition, Independence, the Emergency of 1975, Operation Blue Star, the Delhi pogroms, and the police brutality of the 1980s (Bhogal 2011b). For many Sikhs, the end of foreign rule in India in 1947 did not and could not augur an end to colonialism for the simple fact that the land of Panjab had (p. 285) been brutally riven. The parting gesture of the British—the carving of a national border between India and the newly created Pakistan—ensured that there was no 'after' colonialism for Panjab in 1947. How can Independence mark an *after* colonialism when the very price of freedom was a permanently fractured land? The wound of partition would have the longest-standing ramifications for Sikhs, culturally, economically, and politically. The festering of this wound continues to manifest an ambivalent relationship to the modern nation state.

2. Recognizing Postmodernity as a Condition of Colonial Modernity

Given the embeddedness of European modernity in colonial and postcolonial history, a postmodern critique of modernity risks being little more than a Eurocentric critique of Eurocentrism if the voices of the colonized others continue to be elided. One needs to think the post/modern alongside the post/colonial, particularly when examining the history of colonized peoples. As intimated above, the key linchpin between the modern and postmodern, the colonial and postcolonial is a European (Hegelian) discourse of religion *as* history and history *as* religion (Mandair 2009). This logic of subjugation that Hegel introduces through the invention of religion as a generic concept, works to control the threat of the other by fixing their position along a temporal scale of cultural development. Hegel's *Geist* or Spirit manifests in the world through time, such that the expression of *Geist* represents a temporal development that started in the East but culminated in the West—translating the 'barbarian' (the *geographic other*) into the 'primitive' (the prehistorical other). This shift from a spatial to a temporal logic provided Hegel with an abstract hierarchical mechanism to defuse the epistemic challenge of alternative world views and philosophies—for they merely represented a past and thus outdated mode of thinking. Furthermore, the linking of a movement of time to the development of historical consciousness meant that animism was to be outmoded by polytheism, which in turn was transcended by the higher form of monotheism. Finally, *Geist* manifests in its most developed form (in Germanic Europe) as Critical Self-Consciousness—leaving all colonized cultures permanently encased in backward religion. The overt Christian bias in this discourse relegates other races as 'primitive' in their 'superstition'. Hence this discourse on religion may be understood as providing a racialized logic of coloniality. Europe thus became the world's epistemic centre precisely because of its economic might (via colonization and imperialism). The ability to legislate one's regional view as universal indicates the 'historical' or 'colonial' difference (Chakrabarty 2007 and Mignolo 2006 respectively).

Walter Mignolo (2006) suggests that rather than demarcate a 'linear succession of periods' which obviates the crucial implications of the 'colonial/historical difference', a 'coexistence of clusters' is acknowledged such that alongside the Renaissance and its corresponding early modern period, a darker side—the early colonial period—is recognized. Similarly, the Enlightenment and its modernity are recognized as resting upon (p. 286) its underbelly of coloniality. Mignolo argues that we cannot simply look at one cluster, reading history in terms of the transition from the pre-modern into the modern to the postmodern; instead we must attempt to view the diverse clusters that run through history (2006: vii). The focus on the colonial difference found in postcolonial critiques therefore recalls this 'darker side of Western modernity' (Mignolo 2011) given

that 'much of the world still lives in the violent disruptions of its wake' (Young 2001: 4). The development of (post)modernity cannot be understood apart from (post)coloniality.

Postmodernity, both as style and as era (Lyotard 1984; 1992), is often characterized by its critique of modernity's desire to claim singular universality (or grand metanarrative). It is precisely the loss of faith in modernity's grand narrative of progress that designates the postmodern orientation. In contradistinction, then, to modernity's rhetoric of universality, postmodernity is introduced by terms of plurality, multiplicity, fragmentation, indeterminacy, aporia, interdisciplinarity, irony, difference, parody, simulation, hyper-reality, and is further characterized as a 'shift' from depth to surface. Thus, though Lyotard laments that the 'liquidation' of modernity's grand narrative (1992: 18) is replaced by the shallow goal of profit, postmodern critique presents a possible opening to the voice of the other, as suggested by Mignolo's 'coexistence of clusters'.

In his *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge* (1979), Lyotard explores the 'condition of knowledge in the most highly developed societies'. In these societies knowledge is, on the one hand, commodified: to be consumed by a citizenry where the underlying ethos is commercially defined (Lyotard 1984: 4). Tying knowledge to profit rather than the universal good of humanity ensures its commodification into a form of economic power; this transforms education into an instrument for producing the most efficient and competitive workforce. On the other hand, there is a growing awareness of the arbitrary nature of all knowledge systems, and an increased questioning of the very foundations of modern forms and frames of knowledge. Thus, the commercialization of knowledge is tied to an awareness of its arbitrariness such that the keynote of the postmodern condition is 'incredulity toward metanarratives' (1984: xxiv). Therefore, the authority to make legitimate judgments upon any topic depends not upon some transcendental source for all truth, but rather upon the local set of rules that govern a particular discourse. Again, this would suggest that the postmodern would allow the subaltern to speak (Spivak 1988).

However, many have argued that postmodernity does not reflect a transition into a new age that comes after modernity, but actually presents more of the same continued to an even greater intensity, in that the same modern totalizing cultural logic simply adjusts to the economic and political reality of late capitalism (Jameson 1991).

One could reframe these critiques to voice postcolonial concerns. For instance, according to Marshall Berman's *All that is Solid Melts into Air* (1982), to be modern is to be confronted with radical change that disrupts previous modes of existence (Berman 1982: 15). What could better describe the experience of the colonized? Thus Jameson's 'schizophrenic depthlessness' or even Lyotard's 'dehumanizing' effects of postmodernity are, from this angle, echoes of *colonial* modernity, indicating once again how imbricated

postmodern and postcolonial discourses are. If it is the case that postmodernity is a (p. 287) form of late modern capitalism, then we have to see postmodernity less as a critique of modernity and more as its extension and intensification; more simply if modernity is defined by a critical questioning, postmodernity becomes a form of hyper-criticism. Yet neither engages the very persistence of the condition of coloniality and the reality of the colonial/historical difference.

If it is the case that the transition from pre-modernity to secular modernity is made through a discourse of overcoming religion, then those that argue that 'we have never been modern' given that faith has never been overcome but merely reformulated, provide further evidence that the European conception of religion is central to any conception of modernity (Latour 1993). To elaborate, Bruno Latour (1993) puts into question modernity's hallmarks (a triumphalist science, a progressivist ideology and an addiction to materialism), to argue that the so-called transition to Enlightened critical consciousness is merely a myth. If such hallmarks are themselves understood as grand narratives, then the background of *coloniality* and the *colonial/historical difference* moves into the foreground whenever modernity or postmodernity are addressed.

These critiques reveal the continuity of coloniality and the persistence of translating sociocultural differences within a Western hierarchy of value. In the context of nation states and the nationalization of languages, the status of minority groups such as the Sikhs becomes ever more precarious. Thus the mutually imbricated shifts from modernity to postmodernity and from colonialism to postcolonialism present a story of two kinds of disruption: while the postmodern offers a critique of modernity from within Europe, the postcolonial demands a critique from outside of the Euro-American West.

The key question then is, *how can the postmodern function otherwise than within a series of transformations that merely renew modernity—and thereby continue a form of coloniality?* If the transformation renews and repeats the master-slave dialectic, then the answer lies less in transformation and more in deconstruction and disruption. If modernity is read as a cultivated attitude formed out of a non-listening to the claims of the colonial other, *then* postmodernity can merely intensify this non-listening. In this regard, the idea of a series of transitions or 'overcomings' from pre-modernity to modernity to postmodernity, or from a colonial to postcolonial state, belie the real analytic that requires attention: an obdurate and elusive colonial modernity and the othering of its master-slave dialectic.

There is an undeniable advantage to postmodern thought for it recognizes and carries with an inescapable *aporia* between finite and particular voices trying to speak the infinite and universal story of the world; this endeavour, at least rhetorically, should be expressed through multiple narratives through an awareness of the fictionality of all

accounts of the big picture or grand narrative. Postmodernity would seem to suggest then that the starting point (not unlike Sikh teachings) is the humility to acknowledge that the truth cannot be captured by logic, and when expressed it cannot but be ambiguous. For Sikhs this is what the power of literature (over philosophy), poetry (over science), music and song (over logic and history) teach us—that reason in the guise of philosophy, science, and history should never be allowed to stand alone as the only or even prime authority (Bhokal 2011c). Justice requires particular and ongoing (p. 288) engagements with others not abstract universal statements. This is partly why the Guru Granth Sahib's (GGS) content is composed of a musical and poetic Word. One returns to the Word only when the full limits of logic are realized and the calculative attitude of the ego is finally loosened into an infinite economy of excess; this excess presents life as an unexpected and unpredictable Gift (Bhokal 2011c, 2011d).

From a Sikh perspective, thinking is feeling, and the non-white, the non-male, nature, the body, the woman, and the animal—may all speak truth to the power of European/Christian colonization (Bhokal 2012a, 2012b). The self-conscious rational thinking being idealized within European modernity is problematic; 'I think' is not the whole story of the 'I' and the 'I' cannot be reduced merely to conscious activity—the tip of the visible iceberg. Conscious rational thinking has to contend with the subconscious of forgotten and repressed motivations and judgments that lie hidden beneath its surface (Bhokal 2005). Unless we are aware of the obdurate nature of colonial modernity and its historical difference, the modern 'I think therefore I am' completely overlooks the *colonial* dimension where the 'I' is keenly experienced as *not* being self-constituted, but socially made: the colonized and the slave would plead 'I am only when I am heard.'

In order for postmodernity or postcoloniality to allow the possibility of a new epistemic frame to emerge, the scholars engaged in such discourses would need to work to include the voice of the other as pivotal to the ethical challenge of our times. First, one would need to perceive modernity and coloniality as a single process of a *modern colonial world system* (Mignolo 2000). This in turn would then make visible a *coloniality of power* (Aníbal Quijano's term): 'a global hegemonic model of power in place since the Conquest that articulates race and labor, space and peoples, according to the needs of capital and to the benefit of white European peoples' (Escobar 2007: 185). Thirdly, one could then see that central to that power is the reality of a *colonial* or *historical difference* that works to subalternize non-Western forms of knowledge. Contrary to the Habermasian notion of communication free of domination, one sees here only degrees of exteriority to the hegemony of European epistemic modes. However, this is exactly what most Euro-American theorists, if they have any awareness of it at all, seem unwilling or unable to critically engage with: 'that it is impossible to think about transcending or overcoming modernity without approaching it from the perspective of the colonial

difference' (Escobar 2007: 186). Thus, the common solutions that the West keeps returning to (of Marxism, multiculturalism, or a series of 'posts': *post* modernism, *post* humanism, *post* secularism etc.) all ring hollow—for they do not address the key problem of the colonality of power that spawns the colonial difference. As universalism tends towards totalitarianism, the pluriversal or multiplism, or 'diversality' tends towards interdependent networks. For Sikhs, this shift is always already present and can be clearly seen in the GGS's reading of the one as always many (*ek-anek; asank, kai kot, apar*).

However, the incredible success of such modern/colonial constructions such as 'Sikhism' has made it nearly impossible to capture (precolonial) *sikhi* without entering genealogical deconstructions of the formulation of Sikhism. This is primarily because the rhetoric of empire, imperialism, and modernity gained life through practices of (p. 289) translation and representation—whose centre was Christian Europe. That is to say, Europe's Christian identity afforded it a *double location*: having both the privilege 'of being part of the totality enunciated [for example being one of the 'world religions'], and at the same time the universal place of enunciation [Christian Europe] (while being able to make-believe that the place of enunciation was a nonplace)' (Mignolo 2009: 278). Such a double-location reveals the idea of neutral, scientific, or rational objectivity to be highly problematic, especially as it allowed Christian Europe to announce its own regional values of dichotomous and developmental hierarchies to appear as the 'natural order of the world'.

In as much as postcolonial and postmodern thought does not necessarily challenge this Euro-American 'natural order of the world,' it becomes complicit in re-inscribing the subjugation that is an inherent part of colonial modernity. While remaining problematic, postcolonial and postmodern theory may nevertheless facilitate a radical questioning of the politics, methods and (under)theorization of translation—particularly the European transcription of the other under its own construction of 'religion'—should it seriously engage with the critical discourse on the modern/colonial world system that has at its centre the concept of the colonial/historical difference.

The Politics of Translation and Representation

1. From *Sikhi* to Sikhism: Europe's Method of Manufacturing Religion

Two contemporary Sikh scholars, Harjot Oberoi and Arvind Mandair, though they work in and through the Western idiom are nevertheless highly critical of its categories. Their respective works, *The Constructions of Religious Boundaries* (1994) and *Religion and the Specter of the West* (2009), explore the links between language and culture, religion and secularism, as well as nationalism and fundamentalism. Both *CRB* and *RSW* share much in common: both pinpoint the transition in the Sikh tradition occurring during the colonial period's religious reform movements as a discursive field; they attempt to re-understand the Sikh encounter with British hegemony—Oberoi via the dialectic of opposed epistemes of Sanatan and Tat Khalsa Sikhism, and Mandair via a critique of the politics of translation. Both are critical of academic and community discourses on Sikhs and Sikhism; Oberoi attempts to describe the cultural development of the notion of the category of religion as bounded through the paradigm of anthro-history, while Mandair deconstructs the very distinction between secular and religious fields as they apply conceptually to Sikhs. Both share critical attitudes towards postmodern and postcolonial works, as Oberoi employs a socio-historical 'empirico-rationalist' perspective, while (p. 290) Mandair retrieves certain disruptive aspects of postmodern and postcolonial discourse that bristle in the margins of reason and challenge fixed stereotypical representations. Finally both see the making of religion as a political process; Oberoi views it from the distance of an academic historiography, while Mandair further shows how religion is inseparable from the secular such that the supposed objectivity of academic disciplines are found complicit in the power of the colonial state. Despite so much in common, it is this last point about complicity (which is based upon the recognition that postmodernity is a condition of colonial modernity) that makes Mandair's *RSW* a more compelling argument than that which is found in Oberoi's *CRB*.

Although Oberoi examines how in a certain historical moment dialogical methods of reasoning and relations with colonial mechanisms of power forced a shift and fixing of subjectivity, he is limited by his historical method, and the discourse of history as formative of the colonial gaze. In Mandair's detailed (1995) review of *CRB*, he reads both the *religious* Singh Sabha historians and Oberoi's *scholarly* historiographical method as complicit with an 'epistemological gaze' first fashioned by the colonial administration—

wherein religion is accepted as the categorical framework within which Sikhs are prefigured historiographically.

Oberoi formulates the distinction between the two Sikh reformist movements of the conservative Sanatan and progressivist Tat Khalsa indigenous elites during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries that were responding to British Rule, through polarized and essentialized traits where the former Sanatan 'episteme' is an enchanted, *oral*, and ahistorical world of plurality and heterogeneity, brimming with personal and popular traditions, while the latter Tat Khalsa 'episteme' is a *textual*, historical, impersonal, elite, homogeneous, progressive, and modern one bound by locating fixed identities within equally fixed classifications.

Mandair argues that one cannot account for the shift from Sanatan orality to Tat Khalsa textuality via Foucault's concept of episteme, given that Foucault himself in his later works reconceived this mode of analysis to acknowledge how subjects are decentred through the materiality of language. That is to say, the subject is *formed* by structures and institutions of power that are imbued with language, and can only be recognized socially by their overdetermination. As Mandair notes, 'the major effect of this theory is to put the credentials of the *knower* (the epistemologist) in question', and goes on to argue that this is precisely Oberoi's limitation for 'he fails to acknowledge the continuity and interconnection of his own position as an academic with the disparity in power relations between educational institutions in the West and those in previously colonized countries' (225). 'Ironically', Mandair writes, 'the effects of Foucault's work are even more applicable to Oberoi's own discourse as long as it continues to camouflage itself under the liberal humanist motifs of impartial/scientific historiography' (225).

Mandair concludes his paper by asking, 'how are subaltern communities, such as the Sikhs, to *articulate* "religion", "scripture" and "tradition" within the language and categories of a dominant culture?' (1995: 236)—the question has always been about the politics of translation. The Singh Sabha reforms, according to Mandair, are much better understood through an enunciative practice that brings into focus the cultural translation of (p. 291) the sign. 'Hence the situation for the elites was not one of being "at home" in two different worlds, but rather an existential and psychological dilemma of choosing the 'right sign' in order to represent *between* two cultures' (1995: 232). In what language and with what sign can one be recognized by power? Regarding the politics and centrality of translation practices during the colonial era and beyond, it is crucial then to note a slippage from understanding and accepting translation as a method that cannot completely eradicate *aporia*, to translation as a method that can capture and fix meaning through categorical representation. From such a perspective, one begins to understand the secret hermeneutic lever to modernity and the academy as well as the colonial

administration. It is precisely the effects of this discourse, not only within the colonial context of the Panjab where it led to the construction of 'Sikhism', but also how it informs the very *academic method*, that Mandair's *RSW* and Oberoi's *CRB* deviate.

For Mandair, scholarship needs to become aware of how this complicity with the colonial and orientalist archive is repeatedly camouflaged (both by the academic notion of 'disinterested objectivity' and the reformed communities' assumption of 'authenticity and faith'), and argues instead that the 'shift from the *gaze* of the epistemologist to the *sign* as the site of cultural production allows us to alter the subject of culture from an epistemological function to an enunciative practice' (1995: 226). Here Mandair echoes Mignolo's observation about the global centre of enunciation being the Euro-American Christian/Secular West.

Mandair's *RSW* is the only major work in the field of Sikh studies that takes this enunciation seriously and as central to the formation of Sikhism. A précis of its contents will reveal the depth and complexity of the issue at hand. Mandair takes up Fanon's call, and his thesis is a reflection on the consequences of a form of Manichean reasoning, where the Western claim to universality is left unchallenged by the Gur-Sikh difference.

The natives' challenge to the colonial world is not a rational confrontation of points of view. It is not a treatise on the universal, but the untidy affirmation of an original idea propounded as an absolute...The native...represents not only the absence of values, but the negation of values...he is the absolute evil.

(Fanon 1991: 41)

Mandair mounts a serious challenge to the West by opening the possibility of non-Western others participating in the construction and operation of the voice of universal enunciation. The key difference then between Oberoi's *CRB* and Mandair's *RSW* is that the first operates within Western categories of thought, while the latter perceives this as the key problem that subalternizes Indic and Gur-Sikh knowledge (*gian*). Instead Mandair's *RSW* makes 'an attempt to move beyond eurocentrism by revealing the coloniality of power embedded in the geopolitics of knowledge' (Escobar 2007: 206 n. 6). Alongside Latour and others, Mandair argues that the idea of a radical break within Europe from a religious to a secular orientation is a myth and one that performs a grave dereliction for it ignores the 'essential' *continuity* between different moments in the Western tradition: specifically, the Greek (*onto-*), the medieval-scholastic (*theo-*), and (p. 292) the modern humanist (*logos* or *logic*)' (*RSW* xiii). Mandair argues that this *ontotheological matrix* pervades the colonial context and emerges in subsequent discourses (including the contemporary) across academic, media, and state institutions.

Mandair rethinks the inseparable dichotomy of religion and the secular within key disciplines of the academy: history of religions, continental philosophy, and postcolonial theory. He argues that underlying all three, and tying them together, is a methodology of 'generalized translation', and it is this conceptual matrix that emerged during the colonial encounter between India and Europe. His point is not that there were no precolonial discourses on 'religion', and therefore 'religion' was fabricated in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries per se (Masuzawa 2005), but that it is only during colonial times that religion becomes a conceptual category through which the operation of a generalized translation occurs—and one which persists till today. It is this way of conceptualizing and translating religion (language, and subjectivity), through 'the comparative imaginary of the West', which did not exist before colonial times, that forms his target. As has already been noted, Hegel is central to the genesis of this comparative imaginary and way of translating the other through the imposition of a 'mono-theo-lingualism'—that combines a Western monologic, theologic and monolingual methodology—representing the other under a logic of the homogeneous selfsame identity: one people, one language, one religion and a religion of the one, monotheism.

Yet at the heart of postmodern and postcolonial theory is an ethics of translation. There are, broadly, two forms of translation: one hermeneutic (Gadamer) and the other deconstructive (Derrida):

1. *finite* repetition (totalized representation of meaning as the same that excludes contradiction)
2. *infinite* or aporetic (inherently multiple, ambiguous, and refuses to totalize meaning as the same, and hence courts contradictions).

This difference between two forms of translation is significant to Mandair, because the Guru Granth Sahib favours the deconstructive over the hermeneutic. Only the deconstructive allows equal weight and authority to the voice of the other. This frame of difference is used to explore how the voice of the excluded and oppressed comes from beyond a system's epistemological frame as an ethical challenge; this exteriority is not only literally beyond but also internal to the system as its 'blind spots'. *Sikhi* manifests through a notion of the divine Word that was not exclusive, not tied to language, religion, elite learning, or a particular caste, included diverse voices previously silenced by power: the lower castes and the disenfranchised, regardless of their religious affiliation.

Mandair's *RSW* argues that established academic disciplines employ the same *method* of translation and the same reading of religion *as a general concept* in order to enact such silencing. He traces this methodology back to the key shift from the nature of *translation as essentially aporetic* (or deconstructive) to the relatively straightforward nature of *translation-as-representation* (i.e. hermeneutic). He follows Derrida in calling this

translation-as-representation a ‘Theology of Translation’—one that detects an (p. 293) *ontotheological* motor at the heart of the encounter with the other that betrays the particularity of translation with the universality of representation. This theology of translation transforms the ethical and intellectual complexity of translation, or the *aporia* of translation that always resists closure, into the simplicity and power of representation. It operates by assuming the stable transfer of fixed referents across boundaries. Within this theological fold, the other is depoliticized, ultimately falsifying any claim to disinterestedness or impartiality. This theology ‘institutes a division of knowledge that parallels the division of humanity into *native* versus *ethnic*, *host* versus *guest*’, thus granting ‘belonging to some forms of knowledge’ (active researchers) and ‘nonbelonging to others...(passive suppliers of raw data)’ (RSW xiv-xv). Mandair thus aims to ‘revive the disavowed memory of contact and contamination between Indian and Western thought and culture that has existed since the early colonial encounters’ (RSW xv).

RSW, unlike CRB, refuses the invitation to enter the dialogue of the West *without first* renegotiating the *terms of entry into that debate* (Mandair and Zene 2006: 1-2). Despite the ubiquity of the colonial denotation of religion, Mandair (following Derrida) claims that the very force of its repetition could be dissipated ‘at any moment, if one were to suspend belief in the translatability of the term *religio*, by, for example, asking the Derridean question, “what if *religio* remained untranslatable?”’ (RSW 422)—a motif that seems to emanate from every page of the Guru Granth Sahib. A key distinction between the Abrahamic and Indic traditions’ conceptions of the Absolute and its relation to the other arguably rests with the necessity of *conversion*—i.e. assimilation that often went hand-in-glove with the violence of European colonization. Within the Gur-Sikh tradition evidenced in the Guru Granth Sahib’s internal diversity, content and structure, the necessity of conversion is denied and along with it, the exclusive ownership of the truth. A whole new set of intersubjective and comparative questions are implied, which in turn secure this Gur-Sikh notion of the sovereignty of multiple centres of enunciation. In order to allow these centres of enunciation their voice, Mandair proposes to theorize translation away from a generalized form of colonially inspired identity (e.g. stereotyped representation) toward ‘a spectral politics of the postcolonial’; that is, towards a new comparativism based on the aporetic difficulty of translation which recognizes the original co-contamination of cultures that can lead to a transformation through the revelation of the other as always already being a part of oneself—where the others’ space of enunciation is not colonized (RSW 435).

The universalization of Europe’s regional values (Mignolo 2006: 18-19) was achieved by the systematic and often brutal displacement (if not extermination) of other centres of enunciation and authority. As a result of such Imperial/colonial power, Europe was able to manufacture for the first time hegemony over authoritative knowledge production—

whose metanarrative and epistemic centre was composed of the universalization of the concepts of religion, history, and reason.

Through translation, the precolonial heterolingual space of multiple and hybrid identities and 'religions' was transformed into the monolingual space of homogeneous and now easily divided and conquered identities, marking a move from the complexity of (Sikh) self-other relations to the polarization of the (European) self (p. 294) versus (non-European) other dialectic, otherwise known as the colonial difference. Recognizing this colonial difference, one is ethically obliged to go beyond Oberoi's *CRB* to Mandair's *RSW* given that sociological, anthropological, and historiographic methods are complicit with the past and current repetitions of colonial and imperial power.

2. From Sikhism to *Sikhi(sm)*: Tricontinental Decolonization, Aporia, and the Pluriversal

Within the field of Sikh Studies, a key distinction has emerged between works that are cognizant of the complicity with Western epistemologies and actively work within a *tricontinental* frame to catalyse a redress, and those that either are unaware or remain committed to Western forms of knowledge and its strategic exclusions. In an effort to regain or reanimate precolonial *sikhi*, a move away from the colonial modern construction of Sikhism as a world religion needs to be effected. Such a move would involve a critical employment of postmodern and postcolonial discourses that may be able to instigate a transformed *sikhi(sm)*. Young's term 'tricontinentalism' may point a way out from Western postcolonial discourse that has been, like its postmodern cousin, too narrowly Eurocentric. Tricontinentalism recognizes a shared history of oppression and a political solidarity between peoples of Asia, Africa, and Latin America (the Global South). It goes further by acknowledging the strategic exploitation of the three aforementioned continents by European and American powers, whilst resisting the temptation to map a totalized counter-narrative across cultures. Following Edward Said, tricontinentalism recovers the agency of the postcolonial subject to 'speak truth to power'.

Tricontinentalism 'names a theoretical and political position which embodies an active concept of intervention within such oppressive circumstances. It combines the epistemological cultural innovations of the postcolonial moment with a political critique of the conditions of postcoloniality' (Young 2001: 57). In this regard tricontinentalism is 'both contestatory and committed towards political ideals of a transnational social justice. It attacks the status quo of hegemonic economic imperialism' as well as 'the history of colonialism and imperialism' (Young 2001: 58). Tricontinentalism emerges when those marginalized by the imperial forces of military, economic, and epistemic domination cohere into a more united intellectual front with a shared understanding of the various

dimensions and strategies of Western governmentality and its political, intellectual, and media hegemony.

In the Sikh case *RSW*'s counter-hegemonic narrative may be classed as tricontinental insofar as it seeks to deconstruct the Western academic and Sikh reformist or Singh Sabha construction of 'Sikhism' as a 'religion'. This is approached by engaging with the paradoxes that the imposition of the concept of religion upon *sikhi* has effected, culminating in an attempt to reclaim or reformulate indigenously inspired epistemologies such that they actively challenge the ethnocentrism of this modern colonial Western (p. 295) discourse, with the aim to re-create *sikhi* within modernity's globalizing condition of postcoloniality as a tricontinental *sikhi(sm)*.

The sheer scale and depth of the West's failure on this point of truly acknowledging the colonial difference is often side-stepped by those who want to return to a European logic of non-contradiction otherwise understood within the imperial colonies as the logic of divide and rule. Hence the 'tricontinental' works of Bilimoria and Irvine (2009), Mignolo (2011), and Mandair (2009) provide a crucial bridge in their very refusal of past imperial epistemic paradigms, and in their risk of a genuine new point of departure, as a collective voice from beyond the West even as it originates in the West. Scholars who choose to risk speaking against the grain of Western state, media, and academic governmentality are able to do so because they themselves have been marked by the debilitating effects of the many-tiered violence of colonization. Their *inability to forget* its violence spawns a new vocabulary that promises to retain the memory of their past selves and their past traditions.

The postcolonial/postmodern perspective of tricontinental *sikhi(sm)* calls for a shift from translating the other through fixed representations towards a translation practice that respects the other's difference. This shift can be restated as one that moves from a single centre of enunciation as in a master-slave dialectic towards one that begins with multiple centres of enunciation and authority; viz., from an ontotheological Being to an interdependent 'pluriversal' becoming (Mignolo 2006: 435). This shift allows previously subjugated non-Western knowledges to shape the symbolic or sociopolitical order, and thus participate in the shared but competing expressions of the *non-possessable* universal or 'pluriversal' of public and political space—a shared space that cannot be colonized without the violence of oppressing other 'collateral sovereignties' (Bhagal 2011a).

Today the modern/colonial construction of Sikhism as a religion safely secures Sikhs in a backwardness as well as within a depoliticized space of private worship—coerced to respond to the mantra of modern secularity: where the only acceptable form of religion is one that performs a peaceful, non-violent, and purely subjective iteration. To break open

modern/colonial Sikhism and reinvigorate the repressed precolonial/modern *sikhi*, a temporary postcolonial *sikhi(sm)* needs to be courted, wherein a 'hybrid conceptuality in which European and Asian terms mutually affect and transform each other' (Mandair 2011: 243) is fostered. Such views lead to a redefinition not only of the anthropological project of knowing another, but also of academia, such that scholars listen to, and engage with, if not resurrect, subjugated and aporetic knowledges and epistemologies from their enforced sleep to make them politically active again, so that they may then participate in the 'competition between universals' upon the (first) world stage and thereby shape what the Universal itself can be—i.e. reconfigured as a pluriversal. It is precisely through the 'pluriversal', the 'co-contaminating', and the 'interdependent being-with-the-other' that the Way of the Gur-Sikh gains enunciation and differs so crucially from Christian Europe's 'religion' and Hindutva's '*Dharma*'—for *gur-sikhi* can only be voiced through many tongues and traditions. Hence it is precisely this being-with-the-other-as-oneself that makes the difference between a reified Sikhism (p. 296) (produced by a colonial/modern identity politics of self vs other; Sikhs vs Hindus/Muslims) and a *sikhi(sm)* yet to come, that recalls the tricontinental ethics apparent in the *sikhi* of the Guru period.

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